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AUTHOR Rinnander, Elizabeth; Spinelli, Maria-Lydia
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ABSTRACT

Los Angeles Pierce College (LAPC) serves many Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) students, most of them refugees, for whom English is a second language. In the past, LAPC provided limited English tutoring based on a conversational approach to supplement the more academically oriented ESL instruction available on campus. In response to student dissatisfaction with the conversational approach, greater structure and focus was given to the tutoring sessions. The structured approach revealed severe and unusual asymmetries between different areas of competence that often inhibited further student progress. LAPC's responses included the development of a professional tutoring team approach and the creation of a diagnostic instrument (i.e., the EOPS English Skills Survey) to identify areas of linguistic strength and weakness. The EOPS English Skills Survey, which asks students to complete a series of tasks to measure skills in listening comprehension, oral production, reading comprehension and vocabulary, grammatical structure and usage, and written expression, results in a descriptive profile of student skills for the design of a personalized program of tutoring activities. (EJV)

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THE LIMITED ENGLISH SPEAKING PROGRAM

FINAL REPORT

Submitted to the Chancellor's Office
California Community Colleges
Sacramento, California

An EOPS Special Project funded under
Section 56231 and 56293 Title V
Extended Opportunity Programs and Services

Dr. Elizabeth Rinnander, Project Director

Ms. Maria-Lydia Spinelli, Program Assistant

Los Angeles Pierce College
Los Angeles Community College District

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

Los Angeles Pierce College serves many EOPS students, most of them refugees, for whom English is a second language. Although most have had some exposure to English, this exposure is usually not sufficient to allow them to compete academically with native speakers. In fact, the conditions of their initial exposure to English have been so frustrating that they have developed communicative coping skills which allow them to function at a minimal level but which often interfere with further development of English proficiency. Many of our students have been in the country for prolonged periods of time. Some have received English instruction before coming to Pierce, or even during their stay at the College. However, they still experience and show anxiety and severe limitations in one or more areas of linguistic competence. In some cases, they find themselves incapable of keeping up with English as a Second Language (ESL) courses, and give up on English altogether as an impossible task.

In the past, Extended Opportunity Programs and Services at Los Angeles Pierce College had attempted to provide limited English tutoring, focusing on a conversational approach, to supplement the more academically oriented ESL instruction available on campus. Under the supervision of a trained TESL professional, native English-speaking peer tutors were recruited from the College to spend a few hours per week with eligible students who had limited English proficiency. While students continued to seek tutoring and reported that the tutoring was helpful, anecdotal evidence indicated that they thought a conversational approach was not sufficient to meet their needs. Based on a needs assessment, more structure was added to the tutoring program. As we provided greater structure and focus to the tutoring sessions, we found that dysfunctional coping strategies and limitations occurred unpredictably in all areas of English competence. Severe and unusual asymmetries between different areas of competence often made it difficult for students to progress further or to benefit from ESL classes. This led us to propose the creation of a tutoring team which could provide a more professional service and the development of a diagnostic instrument to identify areas of strength and weakness with which to inform tutors more specifically. The diagnostic instrument is the EOPS English Skills Survey and the team as the EOPS Limited English Speaking (LES) Program.

SUMMARY OF FIRST YEAR ACTIVITIES

Research on Communicative disorders tests and testing procedures was conducted and the preliminary Listening Comprehension and Production sections of the EOPS English Skills Survey were developed, piloted and revised.

A tutorial handbook containing training materials for tutors dealing with ESL methodology, difficulties encountered by different language groups, and different areas of second language acquisition was assembled.

Some special instructional materials not available commercially were also developed.

The remaining sections of the EOPS English Skills Survey (ESS) were prepared for initial piloting.

SUMMARY OF SECOND YEAR ACTIVITIES

During the second grant year, the proposed diagnostic tool was completed.

1) The revised and expanded version of the aural/oral section of the Survey was piloted and modified as necessary.

2) The Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary, Structure and Usage and Writing sections of the Survey were developed and pilot tested during the fall, and revised and piloted again in the spring.

3) The ESS Survey Profile was designed and used throughout the year being revised and modified for efficient use and to yield more accurate information.

4) The ESS Survey Answer Booklet was developed, pilot tested, and revised.

5) The Listening Comprehension section was further revised and recorded in final form for distribution. A professional quality tape was made to standardize administration of the Listening Comprehension section.

6) Art work for the Survey and the Tutorial Package was completed.

7) A handbook for use of the Survey was completed for inclusion in a comprehensive Tutorial Package to be distributed to the community colleges.

THE EOPS ENGLISH SKILLS SURVEY DEVELOPMENT PROCEDURES

Step 1: Definition of Test Content

The first step in development of the EOPS English Skills Survey was to establish the relevant content areas. A content specialist from the the field of TESL, a group of tutors recruited from the field of Communicative Disorders and a test and measurement consultant from the field of English as a second language worked together to review the purpose and goals of the Limited English Speaking (LES) program. Using materials and procedures from the fields of TESL and Communicative Disorders, the nature and number of tasks in each of the different skills areas and the number of items needed for each area were proposed.

Step 2: Generation of Potential Survey Items

The second step consisted of writing the survey items themselves. The content specialist and the tutors generated a preliminary aural/oral diagnostic tool. This preliminary test was administered to 25 students who requested tutoring during the Spring semester of 1986. Based on information from this initial piloting, all items were revised and evaluated for appropriacy of inclusion in the survey. New items and task were developed for the three remaining skill areas proposed. Careful consideration was given to the type and the interpretability of the information that the items and tasks would provide. When there was disagreement over the appropriacy of an item or task, the experienced tutors were consulted. In most cases, the tasks or items were included in the pilot form of the survey but marked for special consideration.

Step 3: Task and Item Piloting

A pilot version of the Survey was developed and used from September 1986 to March 1987 to assess the abilities of the 24 students who approached EOPS for tutoring during this period of time. The content specialist and the test and measurement consultant met monthly during the first semester to revise items and tasks which were problematic. Tasks or items which could not be clearly and precisely interpreted were deleted from the Survey. Items which were unclear to the students were revised or discarded. Revised items were included in the Survey and re-evaluated. Before final piloting, the EOPS English Skills Survey was presented to the TESL/Applied Linguistics Testing Committee at UCLA for comments. No revisions were recommended. In May 1987 the structure and reading and vocabulary sections of the Survey were administered to 75 ESL students enrolled in ESL 84 and ESL 85 at Los Angeles Pierce College. Since the aural/oral sections of the test had already been successfully piloted and revised and no items seemed problematic, no further piloting was deemed necessary.

EOPS ENGLISH SKILLS SURVEY - DESCRIPTION

The EOPS English Skills (ESS) Survey is a diagnostic tool for use of short term English as a Second Language supplementary tutoring programs under the supervision of an ESL professional. The ESS Survey is not a placement test; it does not provide a score. Rather, it provides descriptive information in the form of a Profile for the design of a personalized program of tutoring activities. The strategy used in the design of the ESS Survey can be described as "a thorough spot checking" of different areas of English competence. Information about these key areas provides an ESL professional with a baseline from which to build a well-focused program of activities in a short period of time.

The Survey consists of five sections, with a total administration time of approximately one and a half hours. Sections I and II focus on Aural/Oral skills. To provide more accurate information and to take advantage of the communicative disorders training of our tutors, tasks similar to those found in communicative disorders tests have been incorporated and adapted for a limited English proficiency student population. Such adaptations were necessary to correct for biases toward children, first language learners, and biological and cognitive disorders, none of which are typical of our foreign language adult populations.

Section I: Listening Comprehension is recorded on tape with time allowed for student responses. Three different tasks of increasing complexity are included in the Listening Comprehension section.

1) The first listening task involves discrete sound discrimination. The student is given pairs of pictures or words which represent minimal pairs and is asked to identify the picture or word which corresponds to the word that is heard.

2) In the second task, for each question, the student sees a set of four pictures and hears a sentence which represents the content of one of the pictures. The student must identify the picture which corresponds to the content of the sentence he or she has heard.

3) In the third task, the student listens to two recorded passages and answers multiple-choice comprehension questions which involve the retrieval of explicit or implicit information.

Pictures were used where possible to keep reading demands to a minimum. In the sound discrimination task, words were used only for those pairs which were important but unable to be represented via pictures. This task provides specific information as to the learner's ability to hear certain sound differences which affect meaning in English. The second task contains sentences of varied complexity and length. These provide information as to the learner's ability to understand various grammatical structures and some basic vocabulary items. This task serves as a transition to the third task. In the third task, the learner is instructed to listen to one passage at a time and to answer questions. The nature of each passage is explained briefly to provide a context, then the questions are read to provide a listening focus. After the passage is read, the questions are read again, this time followed by the possible answers. The third task was designed this way to simulate as closely as possible real life listening situations in which the listener is familiar with the communicative context and is usually searching from some specific information. A multiple choice format was preferred to our earlier oral question/answer format in order to separate clearly listening from speaking ability. The third task provides information regarding the learner's ability to retrieve explicit and implicit information.

Section II: Oral Production consists of four tasks. In the first task, the student must read a set of minimal pairs which are often problematic for ESL learners. In the second, the student reads sentences which involve problematic consonant clusters or alternation of sounds. The third and fourth tasks are guided speech samples based on incomplete sentence cues or a picture cue. The incomplete sentence cues are intended to elicit a variety of verb tenses. The picture cue is intended to elicit a speech sample in a less structured situation.

The first two sections contain a slight Hispanic and Southeast Asian ESL learner bias. We considered this necessary in working with our student population. This bias does not constitute a problem, since our student population is representative of the larger populations of ESL learners in the state. In addition, because this section, like the others, is divided into discrete tasks, these tasks could be easily tailored to suit different populations should the need arise.

Section III: Reading comprehension and vocabulary consists of multiple choice and true-false comprehension and vocabulary questions based on three reading passages of increasing difficulty. The passages range from basic structures and vocabulary to complex sentences and semi-technical vocabulary. The most difficult reading simulates a passage from a specialized magazine of general interest, such as natural history or science. This task assesses the student's ability to retrieve explicit and implicit information and to derive the meaning of words from context.

Section IV: Structure and Usage consists of 34 completion items and 14 binary-choice items which assess the student's ability to produce or identify the correct forms of specific grammatical structures presented in restricted environments. This format was preferred to a multiple choice or error correction format in order to allow for the greatest possible freedom of expression. Some completion items have more than one possible answer.

Section V: Written Expression requires the student to generate a piece of writing approximately 200 words in length on one of several suggested descriptive topics. Like the guided speech sample above, this task is designed to elicit a writing sample in a less structured context.

THE EOPS ENGLISH SKILLS SURVEY PROFILE - DESCRIPTION

Although certain sections of the Profile can be filled out by a non-professional, use of the profile should be permitted only to a TESL professional who has carefully reviewed the description of the EES Survey and the procedures outlined in the ESS Survey handbook.

The ESS Survey Profile is used to record the student's answers to the ESS Survey, to interpret the student's performance and to provide specific instructional recommendations to a tutor who may or may not have training or experience in ESL. Different formats have been provided for different sections to facilitate processing and interpretation and to maximize the utility of the information yielded by the Survey.

The ESS Profile provides a column to record the student's answers, one column with the correct answer or possible answers, the plus/minus column to record correct and incorrect answers, and a comments column to provide interpretations where necessary and whatever comments may be appropriate. The Comments column is particularly useful when an answer has doubtful validity or when it is suspected to indicate something which is not directly reflected in the profile or where a pattern is observed.

Special sections have been designed for interpretation of the speech samples and of the writing sample. These sections of the Profile provide criteria for analysis and interpretation of the samples.

In addition to the Comments column, additional space has been provided, usually labelled "Summary," for the TESL professional to provide interpretations and translate them into instructional recommendations. Here patterns can be noted, priorities can be outlined and recommendations for the tutors can be entered.

Once completed, the ESS Survey Profile becomes a representation of the student's areas of strength and weakness and can be used as a reference to provide focus to tutoring sessions, plan activities, choose materials, and develop a short term instructional program. The professional who interprets the Survey on to the Profile should keep in mind at all times that the Survey does not provide any measures of communicative competence or English proficiency. The Survey and the Profile are designed to provide a description of performance in definite tasks. Although the performance of such tasks may be indicative of strengths and weaknesses in areas of communicative competence and general English proficiency, neither the Survey nor the Profile are designed to allow a professional to generalize beyond the scope of those tasks.

The EOPS English Skills Survey is designed to be administered to students who are enrolled as full-time students at a community college and must function in this native-speaker environment. Their level of English proficiency is estimated to be intermediate and sometimes low intermediate.

The EOPS English Skills Profile provides information about the student's ability to perform the specific tasks and elements of tasks required by the EOPS English Skills Survey and it focuses on specific areas of linguistic competence. This may be interpreted as leading directly to a discrete approach to language instruction similar to the one we have used. However, the EOPS English Skills Survey and the Profile are not designed to lead directly to specific approaches to language instruction. The information provided by the Survey does not preclude the use of broader, more integrated approaches to language instruction. The information provided by the survey is used by a TESL professional to make instructional recommendations to tutors. The decision on instructional approach should be left strictly to the TESL professional in charge.

THE EOPS ENGLISH SKILLS SURVEY ANSWER BOOKLET - DESCRIPTION

The ESS Survey Answer Booklet is where the student records his/her answers, except for the production section, which is taped. The booklet is distributed in two parts for easy handling. Since the ESS Survey sections can be administered in any order desired, only the order of tasks and items within each section is provided. Part One contains the pictures and lists of words for the listening comprehension tasks and the reading materials and picture cues for the oral production tasks. Part Two includes the readings, multiple choice answers, the various structure and usage tasks to be completed, and a list of themes for sections III, IV and V of the Survey.

THE EOPS ENGLISH SKILLS TUTORIAL PACKAGE

The complete EOPS English Skills Survey is included and distributed along with instructions for administration and use in a comprehensive EOPS English Skills Tutorial Package. The Package includes:

1) The EOPS English Skills Survey

2) The EOPS English Skills Survey Answer booklet

3) The EOPS English Skills Survey Profile

4) A recorded tape for the listening comprehension section.

5) A handbook for use of the survey in a program similar to ours. The handbook includes:

a) Descriptions of the Survey with instructions for administration, interpretation, and use.

b) Description of our tutoring team. Discussion of background and training needed for optimal adaptation to ESL tutoring.

c) Materials we developed for training of potential tutors, which consist of basic information about second language acquisition, ESL methodology, recommendations for working with adults, and summaries of difficulties which different language group speakers encounter when learning English.

d) Special materials we developed for use during tutoring sessions to supplement already existing commercial materials.

e) Insights we gained from our experience, some strategies for dealing with specific problems, advantages and potential pitfalls inherent in the tutoring of discrete skills.

Two copies of the handbook, one including the tape and intended for use by EOPS directors, and one including only the written materials, intended for the college presidents, have been readied for distribution to each of the California community colleges. In addition, submission of both the handbook and the final report to the ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges is underway.

ERIC Clearinghouse for
Junior Colleges JAN 29 1979